

Unlikely Converts

Sermon by Andy Sochor

Text: James 2:1-4

Sometimes when we think of evangelism and converting the lost, we may have a picture in our minds of the type of person who would be receptive. If we're not careful, we could subconsciously reject/overlook some who may have otherwise been interested (the single mother, the person with tattoos, the immigrant who speaks broken English, the poor man who can't afford nice clothes to wear to "church", etc.). Sometimes the ones who are converted are not the ones we would expect. In this lesson, we'll notice some examples in the New Testament.

The Context of James 2:1-4

- Warning against showing personal favoritism (v. 1) – example given of two men who arrive in the assembly; the rich man was given preferential treatment (v. 2-3) despite what was generally true of them (v. 6-7); the poor man was disregarded (v. 3) despite God's choosing/welcoming the poor (v. 5; cf. Matthew 11:5)
- They were not to make such distinctions (v. 4) – guilty of the sin of partiality (v. 9)
- This specific example was about the rich and poor – but the principle would apply to other distinctions as well; we are not to judge by appearances (John 7:24)

NT Examples of Unlikely Converts

- The Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39) – he was isolated from others Christians, going to and from Jerusalem without learning about Jesus and the church; we should not let a lack of proximity deter us from reaching others (those in other states/countries)
- The Roman centurion (Acts 10:1-8, 34-48) – he was a good man, but a Gentile without basic knowledge of the Old Testament; we should not think that one without a Biblical background is unreachable
- The Philippian jailer (Acts 16:22-34) – he put Paul and Silas in prison, possibly even one who mistreated them; we should not think that one who persecuted us would never be receptive, but it may take a crisis for them to be open to the gospel
- The leader of the synagogue (Acts 18:8) – many Jews opposed the gospel as they had opposed Jesus; we should not think that a "leader" of some other religious group could never be open to the truth
- Those in Caesar's household (Philippians 4:22) – could have been family and/or servants, but this was during the reign of Nero (severely persecuted Christians); we should not assume that one is uninterested in the gospel because of who they are associated with
- The chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:12-16) – Paul described himself as the epitome of an unlikely convert; if Paul can be saved, anyone can be saved

Remember the Parable of the Sower

- The seed was sown on every kind of soil (Luke 8:5-8)
- Not every soil was receptive and produced sustained growth
- The soils represented people's hearts (Luke 8:11-15) – not their background, appearance, etc.
- We cannot know people's hearts (1 Corinthians 2:11) – we can only sow the seed
- We should not judge anyone as being unworthy of hearing the gospel (Mark 16:15; Titus 2:11)
- We should plant and water and allow God to give the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6)

Conclusion

- We have a responsibility, individually and collectively, to try to reach others with the gospel
- We need to be careful not to sabotage our own efforts by prejudging others – Jesus reached sinners, prostitutes, tax collectors, Samaritans, and more; the early church reached Gentiles, Roman soldiers, slaves, government leaders, and more
- The gospel is God's power for salvation (Romans 1:16) – let's plant and water so that God will give the increase